

## Bible - General Questions

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### Why Read Through the Bible in a Year?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

**Today, only 15% of those who claim to be Bible-believing Christians regularly read the Book they claim to believe. 35% never read it at all. The other 50% only read it occasionally. Where do you stand?**

**We could cite many general reasons for reading the Bible, but today I want to focus on the question, "Why should I read it *systematically*?" My purpose is a personal challenge: To tell you why you should make, and stick with, a commitment to read the entire Bible in the coming year.**

#### The Age of Biblical Illiteracy

The statistics I just cited confirm what one religious magazine said about the position of the Bible, even among Evangelicals today: "The Greatest Story Never Read." Dr. Stephen Prothero, who makes his living studying the American religious scene, said this in a 2007 C-SPAN interview: "Among Evangelicals there's been this shift over time – from Bible reading to feeling, from knowing what Jesus actually had to say to having a 'relationship' with a Jesus that they know little or nothing about, from actually reading the Bible to merely revering the Bible, and going back to certain proof-texts over and over again that don't necessarily give you a sense of what the whole Bible has to say." Even though this comes from a man who as far as I know isn't truly a believer, a realistic look at the state of today's Evangelical church shows that Prothero's observations are right on the mark, and terribly convicting.

#### Reading in a Rut

There's another Bible-reading problem among Christians today. For those who do read the Scriptures, it's easy to fall into a pattern — a spiritual rut, in fact — of just reading your favorite books or passages. I've known people who read nothing but the New Testament, or little besides the four Gospels. I remember encountering one long-time Christian who said she never read anything much except the Gospel of John. Some folks read little else but the Psalms and Proverbs. I've actually known men who were respected as experts on the Bible, who admittedly privately that they had never read the entire Bible even once!

Many people have also fallen prey to an idea that developed through Dispensationalism, which says that different parts of God's Word are written to different people in different dispensations. For many people who hear this sort of teaching, it logically follows that they only need to read the parts of the Bible that their teachers say are written "to" them. For this reason, today many people concentrate just on Paul's epistles and on prophecy. Reading only the parts of God's Word that we choose to read may be comfortable or convenient, or it may conform to a certain man-made matrix laid over Scripture, but it's not what God wants.

Both of these problems — neglecting God's Word and cherry-picking God's Word — produce Christians who are weak and shallow, parents who are unable to instruct their children in the true faith, Christians who are overdeveloped in some areas of truth but underdeveloped in others, and soldiers who stand unarmored and unarmed for spiritual battle. To turn a familiar phrase, a Christian without the Bible (or with only the parts of the Bible we choose) is the devil's plaything.

### **"All" Really Means All**

The Bible itself is clear: *We need it all*. Paul under divine inspiration declares, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be *complete*,

*thoroughly* equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Complete and thorough equipping of the Christian involves complete and thorough exposure to God's Word.

All Scripture is inspired, and all of it — not just the parts we may pick and choose — is profitable, for four things. It's profitable for *doctrine*, teaching us the truth by which we are saved and which is to govern every area of our thinking and living. It's profitable for *reproof*, putting the finger on places in our living and thinking where we've gotten off the path of sound doctrine. It's profitable for *correction*, bringing us back onto the right path when we've strayed from it. It's profitable for *instruction in righteousness*, keeping us on the path of sound doctrine.

James puts it this way: "Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22-25).

Immediately after his declaration about Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul exhorts Timothy, "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season!" The force of the original, in context, is this: "Be ready [to preach all Scripture] when it is welcome in the ears of your hearers, and also when it is not welcome." If that is what God wants from the preacher, He certainly wants us to follow the same principle in our Bible reading. We need to be ready to "hear" from God's Word not just the parts we want to hear, but also all of the rest, because all of it is profitable.

### **The Whole Picture**

You need to read the whole Bible because a Christian needs to understand the whole picture of God's eternal plan for all things, and your place in it. You also need to understand that there are no contradictions or paradoxes in the Bible. You can't truly

understand that the Bible is one Book, God speaking with one consistent voice, unless you read the whole Book. Let me give just a few examples.

- Every major Bible doctrine has its beginnings in the Book of Beginnings, Genesis. These include the doctrine of God, the Trinity, origins, man, Satan, sin, Christ, salvation, marriage, the family, stewardship, justification by faith, the origin of languages, angels, God's moral law, the abomination of homosexuality, Israel, the divine covenants, and eschatology (the doctrine of last things).
- Understanding the history of Israel and God's dealings with them will help you better understand the rest of the Old Testament. Why did the Psalmist say he loved the law of God? Why did God become angry with Israel and Judah and evict them from the Promised Land? What happened when God permitted them to return? What were the promises regarding a future Messiah?
- Better understanding the Old Testament will vastly improve your grasp of the New Testament. What are all the prophecies of Messiah that were fulfilled in the first coming of Christ? What is the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah and elsewhere, and when did it actually begin? Why did Paul make a distinction between someone who is a Jew only outwardly, and someone who is a Jew inwardly? Why did Paul make such strong points of connecting all of fallen human beings with Adam, and all who are in Christ with Abraham? Who are all those people in the roll call of faith in Hebrews chapter eleven, and what happened in their lives? What is the writer to the Hebrews talking about as he explains all the Old Testament types and figures of Christ? How do Old Testament prophecies shed light on the book of Revelation?
- The first five books of the Old Testament are quoted nearly 300 times in the New. All told, there are over 4,000 references to the Old Testament in the New. Twenty of the twenty-six books of the New Testament directly quote the Old. Thirty of the

thirty-nine Old Testament books are directly quoted in the New, and all thirty-nine are referred to.

### **You Can Never Outgrow God's Word**

Some Christians have a "been there, done that" attitude toward reading the Bible. Some think they have outgrown the Bible, and they turn to other books and other pursuits more suited, so they think, to their level of spiritual and intellectual attainment.

But the fact is, as soon as you stop reading the Word of God, you begin to forget who God is, and who you are in God's sight. You create a spiritual vacuum into which Satan is only too ready to introduce un-spiritual thoughts.

The story is told of a small advance Marine patrol that landed on a Pacific island during World War Two. When the patrol came to a village, a man who turned out to be a native pastor who spoke English met them. He proudly showed them his Bible, which had been translated into the local language by American missionaries before the war. One of the soldiers scoffed, "Oh, in America we've outgrown that sort of thing." The native pastor replied, "It's good for you that we haven't. We were once cannibals. If it weren't for this Book, you men would have been our next meal!"

Psalm 119 records the inspired thoughts of a man who read God's Word over, and over, and over again. Verses 15 and 16 encapsulate his resolve: "I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget your Word." The force of the Hebrew is that he would meditate, contemplate, and delight in the Scriptures continually, without ceasing, and the result would be that he would not forget God's Word. We need continual, repeated, thoughtful, systematic exposure to the truth, so that the truth will stay with us and in us.

### **An Ocean of Truth**

This thought isn't new with me, but I'm increasingly conscious of it as the years go by: The Bible is an infinitely vast and deep ocean of truth. There is always more to learn, more to apply to life. If you spend an entire lifetime reading it and studying its riches, as you leave this world and enter the glorious presence of Christ, I believe you will realize something that is also glorious — that in all those years of studying the Bible's ocean depths, you only got into it up to the soles of your feet.

**So let me repeat the challenge: Will you, by God's gracious enabling, make and stick with a commitment to read the entire Bible in the coming year?** Carrying out a commitment to do it within a specific time period will help keep the continuity and unity of God's Word fresh in your mind.

**We'd like to help you with that commitment. [Contact us](#)** and we'll mail you a free Bible reading schedule that will take you through the entire Word of God in a year, in about twenty minutes a day. This schedule takes you through the Old and New Testaments simultaneously. You'll find that many times the Old and New Testament readings on a given day have a direct connection! You can start the schedule on January 1st, or on any day of the year. The important thing is to begin!

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